U.S. Tanker Leaves For Guantanamo as Water Relay Begins

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PORT EVERGLADES, Fla., Feb. 15 (UPI) — The United States started its water shuttle service to the Guantanamo, Cuba naval base today with dispatch of a tanker loaded with 4,500,000 gallons of water.

The shipment was the first since Cuban Premier Fidel Castro cut off the water supply to the base in retaliation for the arrest of 38 Cuban fishermen caught poaching in Florida waters.

A Navy spokesman said the tanker Suamico cleared Port Everglades early this morning and is scheduled to arrive at Guantanamo Monday.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. John Cassen, the officer in charge of water loading operations here, said no definite shipping pattern has been established yet, but that eventually the Navy hopes to synchronize shipments—having one ship load while another makes the trip to the big base.

Cassen said the sister ship of the Suamico, the Tallulah, would be the next tanker to take on water for Guantanamo although no arrival time here has been set.

The water is being supplied to the Navy under a 1961 agreement with the Broward County Port Authority. Fort Lauderdale City officials say they can supply up to four million gallons a day at a cost of $4500 a ship-load to the Navy.

Castro had threatened on many occasions to cut off water to the base and finally made good his threat when the United States refused to bow to his demand that the seized fishermen be released.

President Johnson ordered the water shuttle and said henceforth the United States will not buy water from Castro even if he changes his mind and decides he wants to sell it.

The President said eventually the U.S. will build its own salt-to-fresh water conversion plant on the base.